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ABSTRACT

The New York Office of Parks and Recreation (OPR) is committed to upgrading and expanding its interpretive programs in the state park system with a major goal being to enrich, vitalize, and complement content areas of the school curriculum by providing first-hand observation and experience outside the classroom. The legislative mandate of the OPR includes encouraging, promoting, and engaging in educational endeavors; this responsibility is met by construction and operation of nature centers, creation of on-going interpretive programs in large state parks and urban parklands, and development of urban cultural parks. Two nature education centers are now in operation, three additional centers are under construction, and two cooperative pilot programs are training teachers in environmental education. Many traditional interpretive programs are maintained, e.g., nature trails with brochures for self-guided walks; and non-traditional programs have been developed for the visually and physically handicapped and for children of migrant workers. A statewide system of urban cultural parks, created by state legislation in 1977, will be developed to increase recognition and appreciation of urban cultural and natural resources. This program, in conjunction with urban parklands, is designed to provide New York's growing urban population with accessible open spaces and rewarding experiences in the out-of-doors. (JH)

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OFFICE OF PARKS AND RECREATION'S ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Environmental Management Bureau
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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BACKGROUND INTRODUCTION

Close to fifty years ago, conservation's elder statesman, Aldo Leopold predicted that, "In the years ahead, there will be a growing awareness on the part of urban man concerning the importance of his relationship to the natural world." This prediction is a concrete reality in New York State today where we now find mounting and articulated concern on the part of the citizenry over increased air and water pollution, depletion of native flora and fauna, loss of essential wildlife habitat, and irresponsible or unrestrained land development schemes. Such concerns have lead to renewed interest in outdoor education programs as a means of instilling new conservation ideals in youngsters who will someday be responsible for protecting New York's "tomorrow".

Traditionally, privately financed, non-profit organizations with specific outdoor interests -- in ecology, bird watching, wildlife -- have taken the lead in establishing interpretive facilities around the State. These groups are credited with founding roughly half the facilities now in operation. Unfortunately, these organizations must often beg for funds to continue their work and none has the statewide presence to implement its programs in more than a local or regional way. Moreover, these organizations are experiencing problems dealing with municipalities who want to see privately-owned sanctuaries, parklands and preserves taxed in New York State.

Public pressure has lead the Office of Parks and Recreation to reassess present programs in light of these concerns. The Office now stands committed to upgrading and expanding its interpretive programs in the state park system. We currently spend $250,000 a year in our nature education program. This action and the concomitant expenditure of funds is based upon the belief that outdoor education programs are the most practical, efficient, and effective learning tools in acclimatizing not only students but interested persons of any age to the out-of-doors. OPR's primary purpose in undertaking the program is to enrich, vitalize, and complement content areas of the school curriculum by means of first-hand observation and direct experience outside the walls of the conventional classroom. Essentially, by utilizing the rich natural resources of the state park system as an outdoor education laboratory, students will be better able to perceive their place in the natural world. Educators tell us that by extending the classroom to encompass "things natural", students bring deeper insights, understandings and meanings to those areas of knowledge which ordinarily are read and discussed but seldom actively experienced. Quite simply, the senses are stimulated by feeling, touching, seeing and doing.

OPR'S LEGISLATIVE MANDATE AND GOALS

The Office of Parks and Recreation has important legislative mandates that it is required to perform, as detailed in the proposed Memorandum of Understanding:

1. Encourage, facilitate and coordinate the planning and implementation of parks, recreational and historic preservation activities and programs of state agencies.

2. Foster and promote a broad range of facilities and services to meet the growing needs for healthful, leisure-time activities for all its citizens.

3. Encourage, promote and engage in cooperative recreational, educational and cultural activities, projects and programs undertaken by governmental agencies or private philanthropic or non-profit interests for the benefit of the public.

4. Request and receive from any department, division, board, bureau, commission or other agency of the State or any political subdivision thereof or any public authority such assistance and data as may be necessary to carry out its responsibilities.

5. Undertake surveys or analyses deemed appropriate for the performance of the functions, powers and duties of the office through office personnel or consultants, or in cooperation with any public or private agencies.

With specific reference to point three, OPR fulfills its education responsibility in the following four program areas: construction and operation of nature centers, creation of on-going interpretive programs in large state parks and urban parklands, through an exciting new concept, urban cultural parks and through our Environmental Management Bureau. In addition, our legislative mandate has been translated into a series of practical goals that as an agency we are determined to carry out. These are listed below:

Urban-Oriented Environmental Education -

1. That each citizen of every age and every category has an understanding of the substance, the process and the dynamics of the urban system or human settlement in which he or she resides as well as the total global system, so that if and

when that person wishes to improve his/her urban environmental condition (at whatever level e.g.: individual, neighborhood, regional, etc.) that possibility can become a reality.

2. To help people understand the causes and consequences of change--the who/what/how/why that makes their environments take on their characteristics and qualities.

3. To help people design, plan, activate, and implement processes that give them power over future changes in their lives and communities.

4. To nuture a commitment to the concept of shared responsibilities on the local level, so that the physical and non-physical environments are sustained over time in ways that are responsive to people's needs, desires and daily uses.

Environmental Management Goals Relating to Education

1. To train OPR staff in effective environmental management of principles and techniques.

2. To inform and teach Park Administrators and Technical staff about some of the more complex environmental regulatory programs under which the Agency operates.

3. To teach, train and work with local planners (who are submitting proposals for BOR funding) so that their final plans are within acceptable environmental quality limits.

4. To train students and student interns in the technology of Environmental assessment.

5. To inform, teach, interested citizens and community leaders about effective environmental management.

PROGRAM

Nature Centers

At the present time, OPR maintains and operates, two outstanding nature education centers in the State.

The Minna Anthony Nature Center, Wellesley Island: This is a well constructed facility that provides an active program including a series of guide trails, Braille trails for the visually handicapped, audio-visual presentations, self-guided nature walks, educational exhibits and an outreach program for local schools. This facility is open year-round.

Copake Falls Nature Center, Copake, New York: This is a small, but well-equipped nature center that is used seasonally. The center contains exhibits, guide walks, audio-visual presentations and limited outreach programs involving local communities.

Programs in Progress

1. Clark Reservation: With the help and cooperation of local conservation groups, OPR is initiating an adaptive re-use program at the above facility. An existing stone building will be rehabilitated to accommodate a new, year-round environmental education program. This program will be in full swing late this summer.

2. Allegany State Park: An existing building in the Red House Area shall be adapted for interpretive uses this summer. The roof of the building has been repaired and maintenance crews are now working on minor alterations to the structure.

3. Connetquot State Park: This is a relatively new facility now in operation on Long Island. An interpretive program has been established that is "by reservation only". This is necessary because of the extreme sensitivity of the area in question.

In addition, OPR has collaborated on two innovative pilot programs that have proven extremely successful:

BOCES/SCOPE Outdoor Learning Laboratory Program at Sunken Meadow, Connetquot and Nissequogue State Parks on Long Island (Suffolk County): This program, developed in cooperation with the Suffolk County BOCES and the Suffolk County Organization for the Promotion of Education, aims at training teachers to

utilize the outdoor learning laboratories in teaching students. Both profit from the availability of a resource center building, the three outdoor laboratories and a mobile audio-visual and lab facility that can be brought to the schools and used in the field. This is a year-round program.

Tiorati Workshop for Environmental Learning, Bear Mountain, New York: This program was established with the cooperation of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission and the Bank Street College of Education. Its primary emphasis is on the training of teachers and the development of a curriculum that establishes a continuum between the indoor and outdoor classrooms. The facility is used by the teachers and administrators enrolled in the program and by students who are under their supervision. The program draws on the surrounding counties for its participants.

Programs like the two described above increase off peak use of park facilities. In both instances, oversubscription in both programs attests to the inherent worth of this type of program approach.

Museums

OPR operates three outstanding museums that also provide on-going interpretive programs.

Schoellkopf Museum, Niagara Falls, New York: A facility that concentrates on interpreting the geology of the Niagara Gorge area. An active museum program includes educational exhibits, audio-visual presentations, lectures and guided walks into the Gorge.

Trailside Museum, Bear Mountain, New York: This facility is believed to be the first nature center of its kind in the world. The Museum includes an exhibit area, and a North American Zoo. There is a staff of interpreters, and several nature trails. Several remote buildings serve as group camps.

Letchworth State Park: The park contains a Pioneer and Indian Museum that is open to the general public and school groups. One room houses a unique collection of furniture, spinning wheels, costumes and musical instruments used by the early settlers in New York. Another room contains costumes, old rifles, and arrowheads that belonged to the Indian nations who inhabited the area previously. In addition, students can use the William Pryor Letchworth Library located on the premises.

Nature Trails

Twenty-three of New York's State Parks contain trails for the interpretive study of nature. These range in length from three-tenths of a mile at Hamlin Beach State Park in the Genesee Region to over six miles at the Wellesley Island State Park facility in the Thousand Islands Region. These trails contain representative samples of wildflowers, trees, rocks, plants, and soils indigenous to the particular region. In certain instances, staff has prepared trail guides that are available to park patrons free of charge. A complete listing of parks with trails can be found in Appendix A.

Group Camps

At the present time, the Office of Parks and Recreation maintains and operates over 50 such facilities in various State Parks across the State. While most of these facilities are found in the Palisades Region, roughly 20 percent of the total are located in the Allegany, Genesee, Finger Lakes, Central New York and Taconic Regions. In most instances, these facilities are leased to private, non-profit organizations who operate specific educational and cultural programs for their campers. However, OPR does conduct an on-going interpretive program at Harriman State Park in conjunction with its Trailside Museum. Additional group camp facilities at Fahnestock, Allegany, Watkins Glen and at the Barracks at Fort Niagara are excellent sites for new educational programs. These facilities are now being studied for their interpretive potential.

State-owned Historic Sites

Through OPR's Division for Historic Preservation, our agency is mandated to develop and implement a statewide system for historic resource management. Our aim is two-fold: we must protect the irreplaceable resources in question and interpret these unique cultural and historic assets for the state's residents.

Currently, there are 34 state-owned historic sites in the system -- many in various stages of restoration, development and interpretive programming. In 1978 the division began the third phase of revitalization of site exhibitry. Here in New York State we have found that one of the most widely accepted forms of exhibitry is the interpretation of on-going restoration activities conducted by skilled craftsmen at various sites. We shall continue to promote this concept.

This activity, coupled with our expanding interpretive responsibilities and specialized school programs, has afforded us the excellent opportunity to present and interpret New York's unique historic and cultural resources to residents and the public at large. (For a complete listing of the sites, please refer to Appendix B).

Urban Cultural Parks

In 1977, the New York State Legislature amended the State Parks and Recreation Law to provide for the planning of a statewide system of urban cultural parks.

This is a relatively new recreational concept which comprises an amalgam of existing, significant, cultural, historical, architectural, and natural resources in a defined urban area. The "park concept" is not traditional "green space" but rather a subtle mix and interrelationship and (urban) interpretation of the resources mentioned above.

The objectives of the statewide system of Urban Cultural Parks include:

1. Increase recognition and appreciation of urban cultural and natural resources.

2. Harness urban cultural and natural resources for their educational and recreational value.

3. Provide opportunity -- and stimulus -- for development and revitalization of our urban environment in line with contemporary economic realities.

4. Provide a basis for partnership between state and local government and the private sector.

Where will environmental education and interpretation fit into this new program? The Office of Parks and Recreation will attempt to interpret for every man, woman and child the singularly unique dynamics of each urban cultural park. Admittedly, this will be more of an overall education approach involving many educational disciplines rather than one specifically aimed at interpreting the environment. In addition, we expect to provide nature programs that will better utilize existing, rehabilitated historical and cultural facilities so that visitors and local people will become aware of New York's commitment to preservation and the protection of environmental quality.

It is hoped that such parks can serve as attractive environments for urban youths who, in the past, have considered the traditional park concept alien to them. In planning urban cultural park projects, the State's environmental quality goals will remain a strong integral factor in determining the types and quality of services offered to the general public.

Urban Parklands

It is imperative that the State Parks System continue to address the long-range, pervasive problems of the cities and urbanized areas. Here is where most New Yorkers live.

Here, ours is a social and educational mission. In parks located in cities or close to urban areas, we shall continue to collaborate closely with municipalities who remain primarily responsible for programs relating to the urban environment, and we shall continue to provide extension services, transportation programs and contractual arrangements that serve to bring the park experience to the urban users. However, we are attempting to broaden our interpretive programs at urban state facilities. Two good examples come immediately to mind: we operate a continuing, year-round education program at New York City's Roberto Clemente Park. In addition, we recently acquired 254 acres of parklands and open space at the southern tip of Staten Island. This area, locally known as Clay Pit Pond, will have an on-going urban-oriented interpretive program, nature trails and a small demonstration farm. At the present time, we are working on a comprehensive management plan for the area.

When addressing urban problems, OPR continues to stress the theme of stewardship and social responsibility. We attempt to instill protective values in urban park patrons -- i.e., the need for stewardship of natural resources, the reasons for protecting urban open space, plants, wildlife and park property, the rationale for anti-littering, etc.

The Office of Parks and Recreation has a special obligation to the urban poor, the underprivileged, the handicapped. We remain committed to providing educational programs and services that these people can benefit from.

School groups in urban poverty pockets are of particular concern to us. In many instances, we are now providing free bus transportation to such groups, thereby guaranteeing access to state park facilities to students that otherwise would be unable to visit. Moreover, we strive to keep our admission fees modestly low so that visitation becomes an on-going educational and recreational experience throughout the school year. Our environmental education programs will continue to be innovative and increasingly geared to the needs of the blind, the mentally retarded and handicapped who can easily participate in certain learning activities that are stationary in nature.

Interpretive Programs Traditional and Non-Traditional environments

The Office of Parks and Recreation conducts interpretive programs in traditional and non-traditional environments. Each OPR region (except New York City) has at least one major park with a traditional trail program. These trails are used by day visitors and campers who wish a more formal and extensive introduction to their new environment. OPR staff maintains trails that provide a broad overview of the kind of flora and fauna indigenous to the particular park and region. Many are self-guiding and a series of trail brochures -- with a uniform, statewide format -- are now being produced in cooperation with regional staff, local naturalists, and the Bureau of Communications.

While much of OPR's environmental education program is general in nature and is geared to state park patrons interested in learning more about the state's ecological history and natural assets, special non-traditional programs have been developed for those patrons who are visually or physically handicapped. These include "Braille Trails" with Braille coded signs, widened access trails and a cooperation with local agencies that serve these constituencies. In addition, OPR has developed special learning programs for the children of migrant workers in cooperation with the State Department of Education and nature "outreach" facilities for large groups that travel by bus to our state parks.

OPR's Environmental Management Bureau

It was established to provide environmental support services for the agency, its divisions, and for the eleven Regional Management commissions.

It functions as a separate unit responsible for the development and administration of those technical and administrative environmental services necessary to support the establishment, operation and maintenance of our statewide system of parks, recreation facilities and historic sites.

In addition, it teaches, trains, and informs OPR staff and park administrators, local planners (who are submitting proposals for HCRS funding), student interns and local citizens and community leaders on the various laws, regulations, principles and techniques associated with good environmental management. The bureau holds conferences, symposiums and meetings where technological assessments are reviewed, where regulatory procedures affecting the park environment are explained and defined, and where effective environmental programs are detailed and analyzed.

The Bureau stands ready to provide technical services and information to municipalities initiating new environmental education programs utilizing open space and natural resources. As the State's lead agency, we are able to help locally-based recreation agencies and school districts secure HCRS Land and Water Conservation funds for acquisition of natural areas and for trail planning and interpretation. Unfortunately, it is not possible at this time to use HCRS monies for construction of interpretive facilities, but it is hoped that this restrictive impediment will be removed in the future.

Collaborative Efforts

State Fair: The Office of Parks and Recreation has for the past three years had a "presence" at the New York State Fair. With the help, expertise and cooperation of our Public Affairs Department, we have been able to put together (through art work and photography) thematic interpretations on a wide variety of State Park and historic preservation programs. It is expected that this program will continue as we have received excellent public response to date.

Canal Museum: The Office of Parks and Recreation is currently conducting discussions with the Canal Society of Syracuse about the possibility of an interpretive program at their museum. The museum, located near the City of DeWitt, is adjacent to a lock on the Erie Canal. Ongoing negotiations should produce a cooperative working plan with OPR's participation.

Universities, Colleges and Private Groups: We continue to work closely with universities, colleges, high schools, elementary schools and non-profit educational organizations to refine, upgrade and expand interpretive programs at State Parks. More than 55 universities utilized 60 State Park facilities during 1977, 74,671 high school and grammar school students spent some part of their learning day in a State Park facility. These numbers are bound to increase, so will the strength and content of our programs.

SUMMARY

Demographers tell us that New York State's population will continue to grow at a moderate rate. Future populations will concentrate in the cities. However, urbanization is not solely a matter of a place to live, it is -- for better of for worse -- a way of life.

City dwellers will have more disposable income and additional leisure hours to pursue selected recreational activities. To be sure, most of these will take place in the out-of-doors. These people will require more acres of open space within easy reach, more sources for free, uncrowded recreation. While some will pursue active recreation opportunities, many more will seek the contemplative, educational options available through the study of nature. In addition, as education levels continue to raise in the State, a better educated student population will require and insist on exceptional and rewarding interpretive experiences in the out-of-doors.

For both the above reasons, the Office of Parks and Recreation must continue to upgrade and expand its environmental educational program in state parks. As an agency, we remain committed to giving New Yorkers glimpses of beauty and, where possible, interpreting that beauty for them -- even in the confines of the urban design itself.

APPENDIX A

STATE PARKS WITH NATURE TRAILS

Allegany	Allegany State Park
Central	Bowman Lake State Park Chenango Valley Clark Reservation
Finger Lakes	Fair Haven Beach State Park Newtown Battlefield Reservation
Genesee	Braddock Bay State Park Hamlin Beach State Park Letchworth State Park
Long Island	Caumsett State Park Connetquot River State Park Planting Fields Arboretum
Niagara	Buckhorn Island State Park Devil's Hole State Park Earl W. Brydges Artpark Whirlpool State Park
Palisades	Bear Mountain State Park Rockland Lakes State Park
Saratoga-Capital	Grafton Lakes State Park John B. Thacher State Park Lock 4 Canal Park Moreau Lake State Park
Taconic	Taconic State Park
Thousand Islands	Higley Flow State Park Southwick Beach State Park Wellesley Island State Park Whetstone Gulf State Park

APPENDIX B

STATE HISTORIC SITES

Central	Fort Brewerton
	Fort Ontario
	Herkimer Home
	Hyde Hall
	John Burrough's Memorial
	Lorenzo
	Oriskany Battlefield
	Steuben Memorial
Finger Lakes	Gannagaro
	Parrot Hall
Long Island	Walt Whitman House
New York City	N.Y.S. Maritime Museum
Palisades	Knox Headquarters
	New Windsor Cantonment
	Senate House
	Washington's Headquarters
Saratoga-Capital	Bennington Battlefield
	Crown Point
	Fort Crailo
	Grant's Cottage
	Guy Park Manor
	John Brown Farm
	Johnson Hall
	Rexford Aqueduct
	Saratoga Battle Monument
	Schoharie Crossing
	Schuyler Mansion
Taconic	Clermont Mansion
	Clinton House
	John Jay House
	Mills Mansion
	Olana
	Philipse Manor House
Thousand Islands	Sackets Harbor Battlefield